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Postmodern Musicology

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structure. Against all these positions, Mouffe affirms the need for a leftist politics which actively engages in hegemonic strategies, constructing lines of equivalence among diverse identities while admitting the necessary contingency, historicity, and incompleteness of its attempts. Only in this way is it possible to affirm a multiplicity of partially overlapping identity struggles in Marxism, feminism, gay and lesbian politics, **postcolonialism**, and the like, while avoiding the temptation to see this multiplicity as a threat to some vital unity of the Left.

Mouffe calls this a postmarxist politics of radical democracy, and a reconstruction of the political imaginary of the Left. It aims to deepen the modern democratic revolution by politicizing realms of modern life usually understood as apolitical or private. This requires the articulation of neither neutrality nor some substantive moral good, but rather of a political good presented as an ideal of democratic citizenship. This, in turn, outlines the limits of democratic pluralism and political **community**, as it must exclude those who would not accept the "democratic rules of the game." On this point, Mouffe's most important teacher is Carl Schmitt, who recognizes the impossibility of escaping the friend/enemy distinction in politics. Schmitt used this idea to maintain the incommensurability between liberalism and democracy, holding that since the former relegates a series of disruptive identity issues concerning morality, religion and the economy to the private sphere, its effect can only be to undermine the democratic unity of rulers and ruled in modern, liberal states. While acknowledging the power of Schmitt's critique of liberalism, Mouffe maintains that modern democracy cannot be understood in terms of the homogeneity of an organic society, but must instead follow Claude Lefort and acknowledge, as a consequence of pluralism, the ways in which democracy embodies a "dissolution of markers of certainty" and leaves the institutions of political power as "empty places" around which various struggles for influence and hegemonic redefinition take place.

See also: Derrida, Jacques; post-Marxism

Further reading

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NATHAN WIDDER

musicology, postmodern

The discipline of musicology, like the word itself which the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates only back to 1909 (or even 1915), is a twentieth-century, specifically Anglo-American institution echoing the tradition of French *musicologie* and with analogies to German *Musikwissenschaft*. As a modern and ineluctably postmodern project, musicology derives from a predominantly Austro-German generation of scholars who translated a continentally European tradition of analysis (Heinrich Schenker and, in London, Donald Francis Tovey and Hans Keller) and formal music theory (routinely articulated by then-contemporary new composers: Arnold Schoenberg, Rudolf Réti, and Theodor **Adorno**, as well as Karl-Heinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez) into English language university contexts.

More than a knowledge of music history, acoustics and aesthetics, harmony and counterpoint, modern musicology ambitions a specifically, even positivistically epistemological project. Its methods range from the formal, structuralist schemes of analysis (such as Schenker's hierarchy of levels (*Stufen*) or lines (*Umsatz/Urlinie*), culminating in precise and mathematically parsed expressions of high theoretical modernism) to Schoenberg's encompassing retrieve of traditional music theory culminating in his own modernist twelve-tone compositional theory. The difference between modern and postmodern musicology is rooted in the same method Friedrich **Nietzsche** had

charged with a painless triumph over science in our own times. Instead of a comprehensive, absolute understanding of music, postmodern musicology reflects not only the proliferation of smaller or local narratives and points of view. Jean-François **Lyo-tard** had analyzed as the postmodern epistemic condition in the wake of the demise of "grand narratives" and a monotonic (Western) Enlightenment perspective, but the inherent scepticism or ironic sensibility of a sophisticated era characterized by Umberto Eco as the "age of lost innocence." Music is not made for music's sake but is keyed to commissions, recording and concert fees, and above all record charts: for as Derek Scott observes "classical music is as involved in the marketplace as pop and jazz" (1999: 134).

If the formalism and high theory of modern musicology arguably reflect frustrations inherently endemic to *émigré* scholars in an American context, postmodern musicology's disciplinary fortunes mirror the poststructuralist and deconstructive movements in the wake of postmodern theory on every level, inevitably challenging the whiggish convictions of a discipline devoted to high art or traditional Western concert music. Thus the new historicism reflects radical changes in the larger discipline of history. Debates on early music may be conducted not only from ancient or modern but also postmodern perspectives (see "Symposium: The Early Music Debate: Ancients, Moderns, Postmoderns," in *The Journal of Musicology* (1992) 10(1): 113-30). Postmodern history of music goes beyond philological or autographical study to include heretofore new sources, transforming archival work with archaeological, sociological, anthropological even engineering and materials science, etc. The traditional focus on Western music is called into question and all musicology, in a postmodern echo of Walter Pater's originally formalist and ur-modern musing, might now be said to aspire to the condition of ethnomusicology. Bruno Nettl, in "The Institutionalization of Musicology," observes that Waldo Selden Pratt's claim that "musicology must include every conceivable discussion of musical topics" (Nettl 1999: 293) includes the creative consequences entailed by Charles Seeger's seminal transformation of ethnomusicology. Further transformations resulted from what Ellen Koskoff names "a rebellious lot of

postmodernists with their individual readings, deconstructions and non-centered, non-theories" (Koskoff 1999: 546). Withal, the ideal (and value) of *art music* came under attack as betraying the values of a particular (bourgeois or upper/middle) class.

Kerman's provocative study, *Contemplating Music*, with its plea for a more responsibly or rigorously historical and interpretive understanding of music, including the variety of necessary aspects of musicology: "paleography, transcription, repertory studies, archival work, biography, bibliography, sociology, *Aufführungspraxis*, schools and influences, style analysis, individual analysis . . ." (Kerman 1985: 123), elicited a predictably reactionary, positivistic response from conservative musicologists who rightly heard in this the challenges of the genealogical theory of Michel **Foucault** together with a panoply of perspectives drawn from such divergent (and variously) received scholarly arenas as **queer theory**, as well as cultural and race studies, feminism (see **feminism and postmodernism**), **deconstruction** and **structuralism**, Lacanian psychoanalysis, **semiotics**, and **film studies**. Such challenges, like the modishly "rebellious" efforts of Lawrence Kramer's postmodernism, reflect the explicitly heteronomous project of postmodern musicology "conveying the connectedness of all musical thinking" (Cook and Everist 1999: xii).

Postmodern musicology thus offers a radicalized continuation of modern musicology by consummately modern means. Resisting the progress ideal of totalizing knowledge, it includes aspects formerly (formally) excluded as irrelevant to music as aspects forming the broad basis of the culture of music in all its dimensions. Emblematically, José A. Bowen's "Finding the Music in Musicology: Performance History and Musical Works" cites Nelson Goodman and footnotes Ludwig Wittgenstein along with Lydia Goehr's *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, but Bowen concentrates less on philosophy than audiophile discography. Hence, in its most general expression, postmodern musicology responds to what Fredric **Jameson** calls the "cultural logic of late capitalism" reflected in the same culture industry transforming radio and television media into comprehensive agents of unidimensional influence. Although most contemporary music hearers are no longer likely to know

the amateur's condition of musical practice so important for Roland **Barthes's** reflections, more people hear more music of more kinds than ever before—not only by attending concert performances or listening to the radio but also in the multifarious contexts made possible by recorded music: music video, web audio files, music broadcasts in office buildings, restaurants and malls, elevators, airplanes, etc.—and television and radio commercials have always had distinguishable “soundtracks.” Following the exactly “background” conventionality of film music (a focal subject of postmodern musicology), music is the ambient atmosphere of postmodern culture and postmodern musicology reflects the popular diffusion and scholarly, theoretically exemplary influence of electronically recorded music, particularly in its digitalized, not record and not taped (analogue) format. If musicology typically focuses on the notational tradition of Western art music, it also has an affinity for the study of recorded music (this runs from early records to digitalized compact disc recordings and beyond and is the reason most guides to musical style and language include lists of appropriate recordings: fixing not only the work but also the performer/performance and the conditions of production as exemplary).

The transformation of hobby hi-fi into the culture of high end audio sensibilities informing every decision to purchase an automobile or computer, metamorphosing the corner record store into a host of different, huge theme department stores (FNAC, Virgin, Tower, and so on) dedicated to retailing recorded music in every major city of the world, illustrates the late capitalist exponential proliferation of market ventures beyond suburban-mall developments to the Internet. In the virtual marketplace, consumers are imagined as expressing an infinity of different musical needs/moods.

Postmodern musicologies do not question the imperatives of late capitalism. But they do move away from encompassing accounts or critiques toward ironic or playful, pluralized and conscientiously diverse perspectives, changing the musicological canon in theory, without altering the standard repertoire of music on offer in high culture (Randel 1992). Yet the variety of perspectives can be overstated. Thus Kramer's *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* could appropriate

the “canon” of multifarious attention to interdisciplinary perspectives and the broad cultural context that belongs to (if it also transgresses) the persistently romantic and nineteenth century ideal of music. Yet, although a composer, Kramer does not write as one and his critical categories are surprisingly limited to deconstructivist/poststructuralist literary theory.

Newer musicologies seek to rethink the “disappointments” of such literally literary allies in favor not only of new musical histories and performance studies but also the broader theoretical range of ethnomusicology. One review of style codes as social conventions is compellingly detailed with the observation that although “the interval of the tritone...conveyed emotional anguish to seventeenth century Venetians” it lacked the same meaning for contemporary “Scottish Highlanders. There is an old Piobairachd of uncertain date bearing the title Praise of Marion (‘Guileagag Moraig’) which, in one variation alone, contains 21 tritone within 32 bars” (Scott 1999: 141). Ethnomusicology necessarily includes context, musical and otherwise, articulated along a shifting border between the musical and the non-musical. The voices of critical musicology include not only ethnomusicologists *per se*, such as Nettl, Koskoff, Philip Bohlman, along with students of nationalism in music, like Richard Taruskin and Pamela Potter, but also analysts and theorists such as Arnold Whittal, Robert Fink, Nicholas Cook, Mark Everist, Leo Treitler, students of film music and musical semiotics, music psychology, and theorists of musical style, such as Rose Rosengard Subotnik as well as Carolyn Abbate and historians of gender in music, such as Ruth Solie, the historian Gary Tomlinson and the historian of music, Katherine Bergeron, as well as philosophers like Goehr, Daniel Charles, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Catherine Clément, and Stanley **Cavell** representing some of the other “voices” claiming a hearing along the byways of the musicological mainstream.

Modernism in music begins with the invention of recording—a necessary coincidence from Adorno's perspective, as Michael Chanan's study (1994) further documents—and was perhaps hardly accidentally simultaneously entombed in the age of electronic reproduction. Postmodern musicology's attention to performance practice

continues modernist attention to the importance of historical performance practices (including “authentic” or period instruments) to the technically “prepared” shock of presentation increasingly routine in the performative context ranging from John Cage’s *433* to George Crumb’s *Makrokosmos*, installing the fetishized piano laid bare in time and as performance (object).

Although postmodern music is as unwieldy a term as any in the postmodern nomenclature, it is better defined than the other arts just because (continuing an ancient parallel) modern music is as distinct a phenomenon as modern (or postmodern) architecture. Postmodern architecture does not alter the ethos of modern design but flattens it out: absorbing the demands of critique with unmistakably, calculatedly, superficial detail. Form still follows function but function reflected in formal design elements (quoted columns echoing the new canon of the toy block writ large, and not, say, pretending to quote a Doric order, except and this is the idea, in the consumer’s/reviewer’s mind, and so on). If modern music is characterized by its atonality and dissonance (*à la* Schoenberg) and hence in terms of its revolutionary disposition with regard to the canons of both classical and romantic musical styles, the fascination with the idea (not the sounding) of silences in (discourse on) postmodern music (via modernist minimalists like Anton Webern, John Cage, Morton Feldman, and so on) characterizes the impossible opposition (a music that cannot be heard, a music that is “not music”) that is the inevitable legacy of modern music as Adorno describes it.

This is the old new music at the end of the twentieth century now received with a striking absence of concert-hall outrage or even reviewer’s pique (thus, as one critic yawns, Philip Glass stretches opera’s limits less and less with each new premiere), incorporating minimalism and atonality with melody but also the higher ambitions of precisely pre-classical, quasi-baroque, pseudo-liturgical musical pieces or else, not always alternatively, cosmic celebrations of scientific images, world-views, and transformations.

The jaded trajectory of new music bears numerous analyses. Jost Hermand assesses the vanishing of an authentic avant-garde in music as coordinate with the “alibi” motivation of a postwar

interest in musicians formerly denigrated as decadent. The musical avant-garde had failed to effect not only critique but change for a host of reasons, including access to concert and opera halls, recording studios and a sufficient mass of listener or consumer support but most perniciously because it ran awry of the National Socialist music aesthetic. For Hermand, the return to the atonal in Germany as revived at the Darmstadt festivals, and the serialism and minimalism celebrated in mid-century at Harvard, preserves the vain ideal of absolute music in the absence of political/social reference. Beyond modernist sensibilities, postmodern music is music that seeks to work as new after the eager hope of shocking one’s listeners has been sacrificed to the reality of the jaded ear and the continuing saga of disinterest, lack of access to concert and opera halls, recording studios or contracts and so on. The focus on jazz as progressively, impeccably playful postmodern music retains this politically corrective aura or phantasm. Thus Scott declares “12-bar blues” more important “to twentieth century music than the 12-note row” (1999: 139).

Perhaps more than anything else, the postmodern condition of music corresponds to the recurrence of the religious in the absence of belief. This has many expressions from Henryk Górecki (1933) and Olivier Messiaen (1908–92) to the runaway commercial success of *Chant*, recorded by the Benedictine monks of Santo Domingo de Silos, and even “new age” compositions. Although the same musicological canon that excludes popular music likewise dismisses “new age” music, “serious” or art musical compositions of the late twentieth century share many spiritual overtones with new age music, just as Stockhausen’s atonal music recalls religious Tibetan tone poems.

Aligning the modern in music with the avant-garde, the noise/music of Cage remains closer to what the composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with their generous enthusiasm for “New Music” (Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) and Claude Debussy (1862–1918) could praise as then-contemporaneous externs (particularly the music of Schoenberg (1874–1951) and the Second Viennese School, such as Alban Berg (1885–1935), Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924), and Anton Webern (1883–1945)). Such fondness for the

avant-garde, and optimistic sense of the liberating qualities of music as pure sound has markedly diminished in composers of the late twentieth century. Postmodern musicology reflects the disappearing difference between art and popular culture in a postcritical world culture in the wake of the late twentieth century deconstruction of geographical, political/social, but above all economic walls and borders. Thus, the Kronos Quartet or Hilliard Ensemble offer the quintessentially postmodern or marketing proof that recording new old music (Carlo Gesualdo (1560–1613) or Thomas Tallis (1505/6–85)), is as profitable as new new music (George Crumb (1929) or Arvo Pärt (1935–)).

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